

'History will remember you, Albo'

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'Our voices weren't allowed in the building today. But will you listen to the young people who need so much more than weak targets? We need a real plan to address the climate, jobs and housing crisis.'

Those were the cries of activists from Tomorrow Movement, who are campaigning for 100% of Australia's energy coming from clean and renewable sources by 2030. Joining them in their demands were an array of Green MPs and Senators while Independents such as Monique Ryan, the Teal who ousted former Liberal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, also came out to show support.

'But do you notice who is missing?' the group later added. 'The Australian Labor Party.'

Indeed, not one of their MPs and Senators came out to address the crowd, exposing a striking if not predictable shift in political geography since an election campaign where progressive parties had united in attacking the Liberal Coalition's reluctance to take the climate crisis seriously.

This shift was predictable in that, once Labor's rhetoric of ['ending the climate wars'](#) was put to one side, the substance did not much differ from the Liberals when it came to actual policy and targets. Both major parties [signalled](#) continued financial support for the coal industry and Labor's target of a 43% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 from 2005 levels is only 13% higher than where the previous administration was [projected](#) to reach, with both targeting net zero by 2050.

The Climate Change Bill currently going through Parliament will enshrine those targets into law although, as a result of [negotiations](#) with the Greens and Teals, Labor has accepted some amendments, including a commitment that current climate change targets are a legal floor and not a ceiling on future ambitions. This is vital if the worst outcomes of climate change are to be avoided.

According to analysis by Climate Analytics, Labor's current policies leave us on track for 2 degrees of warming - an outcome which, if consistent, would very likely destroy the Great Barrier Reef along with all other tropical reefs. Globally, extreme heat events that might have otherwise occurred once every decade could occur every three years and would be significantly hotter. They calculate that only the Australian Green's policy of a 74% reduction by 2030 keeps warming to 1.5 degrees, likely saving some areas of tropical reef and restricting global heat events to one every 5 years.

This necessitates immediate action across different policy areas, focused on where the most significant reductions in emissions can take place in the years leading up to 2030. A recent report by the [Climate Council](#) contains three key areas where fast progress could be made.

An urgent national drive to improve energy efficiency in commercial and residential buildings, where roughly [23%](#) of Australia's emissions total is emitted, should be top of the agenda. This would include updating the National Construction code as well as introducing mandatory energy efficiency disclosure and minimum rental standards. In addition, a national upgrades program is needed for the 9.5m homes which were built before existing efficiency rules came into force. Australian homes are ranked nationally on a scale of 0-10 stars, with a 0 rated home providing no protection from the climate and a 10 rated home requiring essentially zero artificial heating or cooling. While the [minimum performance](#) for new build homes currently stands at 6 stars, the average Australian home languishes at 1.8 stars. Efficiency upgrades would include subsidising the replacement of inefficient domestic appliances as well as double glazing and thermal insulation, something which should be an easy sell politically given the spiralling cost of energy bills impacting businesses and households.

An example of how this can be done effectively at scale can be seen across the pond in the UK, where several [Green led local councils](#) are currently coordinating the insulation of their 40,000 council homes. By prioritising the housing stock that lies under their direct control first, the councils hope to enable the growth of a sustainable local supply chain and workforce which reduces insulation costs for wealthier households, encouraging take up across the board.

The report also stresses the importance of ensuring clean, renewable energy coming on stream and being utilised as soon as possible, with funding given to priority projects to expand and modernise the

transmission network in order to achieve 100% renewable electricity. These will centre on building the [battery powered storage capacity](#) needed to cope with the periods of energy over and under supply caused by an increasingly variable, climate dependent renewable energy system. As well as ensuring supply, the report argues that there is an urgent need to set a date for banning new sales of fossil-fuel vehicles by 2030, a policy commonplace in Europe but yet to be enacted at a federal level. [Australia Institute](#) research published last year showed two-thirds of Australians supported banning sales of petrol cars by 2035. The [ACT government](#) has taken a lead already, phasing out internal combustion engines by 2035. It is also the only state/territory in Australia to reach 100% renewable energy. Investment in public transport should also be increased as a means of reducing reliance on fossil fuels, with at least 50% of all transport funding spent on public projects and a further \$500m spent on active transport infrastructure such as cycling and walking.

Furthermore, putting an end to state subsidies for fossil fuel production is seen as critical to ensuring no new fossil fuel projects begin from now onwards. [114 new coal and gas projects](#) are currently on the federal government's books, threatening to undermine emissions reduction targets. Scrapping these is a prerequisite for the energy sector to reach net zero by 2050. Measures include amending the investment mandates for Export Finance Australia and the North Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) to completely outlaw finance for fossil fuel infrastructure, suspending annual offshore oil and gas production licences and exploration permits, as well as ending taxpayer funds for carbon capture and storage – something the report describes as a 'failed technology' which has been 'used as an excuse for building new fossil fuel projects releasing significant new emissions.'

A return to carbon pricing would also present a more radical addition to the government's policy armoury, despite its turbulent political history. [Papers](#) from the early days of the Howard government have revealed that advice from government experts was that a carbon pricing scheme was the most effective way to stabilise emissions. Both the Howard and later Rudd government agreed to bring in a watered-down market-based emissions trading system. Under such a scheme, the government sets an overall national limit for emissions, granting companies permits to emit a certain amount proportional to their average historic baseline of emissions. If any company wants to emit more than their allowance, they have to buy more permits from selling companies, in effect penalising companies who emit more and reward those who emit less. Its efficacy was [criticised](#) by the Greens, who cite previous government modelling which stated that emissions would not have started falling for around 25 years.

They instead supported the Gillard government's [Clean Energy Act 2011](#) which legislated for a fixed carbon price between 2012 and 2015, with higher emissions reductions targets than agreed under Rudd, before moving back to an emissions trading scheme with a floating price. There was an [immediate drop](#) in emissions for the two years in which the scheme was operational, until it was scrapped by the incoming Liberal government of Tony Abbot and replaced with the Emissions Reduction Fund.

A fixed carbon price would be a hard political sell in the short term, given the extra cost imposed on consumers in the midst of serious cost of living crisis. However, the experience of the Gillard government shows that subsidies to low-income households and small business can help offset those increased costs. A carbon price would also speed up the transition to cheaper green technologies whose costs are falling precipitously, moving us away from a world of fossil fuel cartels dictating the global price of energy.

The solutions are ample and staring the government in the face. It is now time to see whether the Albanese government has the political will to follow through on their words, with serious action.